

Testimony:

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Michigan State List of Qualified Interior Designers  
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## **TESTIMONY**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee members, for allowing me to speak on behalf of HB4770, HB4771, and HB4772. I am Linda Thomas, The Coalition for Interior Design Registration (CIDR) president and an interior designer for 21 years.

CIDR is the organization of interior designers and allied professionals dedicated to protect the life-safety of the public and to promote free and fair competitive access to the marketplace.

As the president of the coalition, I will be providing the Committee with a summary of the current situation for interior designers in Michigan. Since 1985 - 22 years, CIDR has been seeking valid state recognition for the profession of interior design.

### **Interior Designers are currently regulated under PA 250 of 1998.**

This legislation was sought in response to PA 400 which specified that design professionals must be registered or licensed. PA 250 was an exemption to PA 400.

PA 250:

- Provided a legal definition of interior designers and the scope of service they can provide
- "Creditalized" Interior designers – not registered, certified, or licensed but "creditalized"
- Established the State List of Qualified Interior Designers
- Granted permitting privileges for those listed designers allowing the use a stamp
- Provided an expanded market place – open, fair, and competitive

This law eliminated the need for the consumer to pay both an interior designer and an architect for identical services on a single project.

*Governor John Engler signed this law because he recognized it as the solution to the restraint of trade and would provide for an expanded market place – open, fair, and competitive.*

### **Unforeseen Complications of PA 250**

**1. Agreed-to language hammered out after 18 months of negotiations with all concerned parties is excluded from final draft of the bill complicating the implementation of PA 250. Those involved in these negotiations were: architects, engineers, interior designers, code officials, members of Michigan Homebuilders.**

**2. International Building Code** – This document was intended as a uniform standard for the industry. But each state could adopt it as written or with modifications.

The Michigan version of the IBC defines "registered design professional" as an individual who is registered or licensed. **Interior Designers are neither registered nor licensed in this state.**

**3. Consumer & Industry Service issued technical bulletin #36 confusing code officials.**

Interior Designers could do little more than select colors without the supervision of an architect.

**These complications seriously compromised the intent of PA 250 and essentially rendered this law ineffectual.**

The three-bill package, HB4770, HB4771, and HB4772, uses the same agreed to language as PA250 but instead of credentializing interior designers it will provide for valid state recognition through licensing.

The current situation in Michigan is that any individual can call oneself an interior designer with no interior design education or training. This puts the public at great risk.

Recently a qualified interior designer shared this story with me. She was asked to “fix” a situation at a large, high-end assisted living facility that was designed by an architect. Interiors were done by a well-known *decorator*.

Although aesthetically pleasing in appearance, the decorator used inappropriate materials and finishes that are more suited for residential or light hospitality. The materials that were used are not inexpensive. In the normal course of use of the living spaces in this kind of a facility, the materials selected are wearing out rapidly and then being replaced with similar items. Rather than the fabrics, carpeting, etc. lasting 10 years, they are lasting two or three. This resulted in additional costs to the facility as they need to replace more frequently. Besides materials that are not durable, issues regarding glare, way finding, adequate lighting, mobility problems, microbes and other sanitary problems are not being addressed. Individual apartments and suites are either devoid of grab bars or they are inappropriately located. These issues directly impact the life safety of the residents.

Last fall Detroit Fox 2 reporter, Rob Wolchek from the Problem Solvers Hall of Shame did a two-part expose on how a convicted felon posed as an interior designer and swindled several dozen people out of thousands of dollars. One couple gave him over \$100,000. This man was never caught.

Even architects opposing this legislation have testified in the past to instances where so-called interior designers have been unqualified to perform the work they did. With HB4770, HB4771, and HB4772, these interior designers could now be called into accountability before a state board. Instead they are free to perform sub-standard work.

Another troublesome situation is that building code officials in a number of municipalities are rejecting construction documents prepared by interior designers because the IBC recognizes only architects and engineers as “Registered Design Professionals”. These plans are for services interior designers have always been permitted to perform. Office furniture systems layouts are being rejected by building code officials because they do not carry an architectural seal. This puts a cost burden on the consumer to pay twice for the same service from both the architect and the interior designer. In addition, it comprises the creditability of the interior designer with her/his client.

The profession of interior design is a key profession in the building and design industry. The majority of interior design firms are small businesses often with just a sole practitioner. Four out of five interior designers are women. Currently in the U.S., 26 states and jurisdictions as well as 8 Canadian provinces have laws recognizing interior designers. Another eight states have legislation in process.

In Michigan, there are 15 colleges and universities that offer an interior design program. Most of these are state funded. These programs provide a separate and unique body of knowledge that educate and train the interior designer. These interior design programs, just as architecture programs, train students to practice in both residential and commercial design. They also prepare future interior designers to sit for the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) exam. NCIDQ is an independent testing body whose members comprise the state boards with interior design legislation. With successful passage of their exam, interior designers are qualified in their own right. They need not belong to any professional organization like American Society of Interior Designs (ASID) or International Interior Design Association (IIDA) to retain this certification. Some trade or professional organizations provide certification through only their own organizations. If individuals decide to leave that organization, they lose their certification.

Let me emphasize that Michigan's proposed interior design legislation has always been structured to be fair. Contrary to what you may have heard, no one will be put out of business when these bills are passed into law. Yet it will lift the restraint of trade that currently burdens interior designers in this state. It provides for retail and residential exemptions as well as for those licensed through another profession that provides interior design services, i.e. architects, engineers, builders.

In the days in Michigan of heightened budgetary restraint, these bills maintain fiduciary responsibility. A conservative estimate of individuals applying for licensing during the grandfather period would be 2000. With the initial application cost of \$50 and the three-year fee of \$210, the amount generated for the state would be **\$520,000**.

The bills you have before you are put together:

- to safeguard the health, safety and the pocketbook of the public
- to give the consumer a choice
- to eliminate the restraint of trade
- to protect the right to practice the profession of interior design in Michigan

This legislation will bring much needed clarification for the consumer, for the interior design profession and for the building code officials